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Viewing cable 06SANJOSE707, FUTURE PUSC DEPUTIES STRESS IMPORTANCE OF "SOCIAL"

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06SANJOSE707	2006-03-30 23:18	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy San Jose

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-03-03/Investigacion/NotasDestacadas/Investigacion2697430.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-03-03/Investigacion/NotaPrincipal/Investigacion2697496.aspx>
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INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE

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SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/29/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [CS](#)

SUBJECT: FUTURE PUSC DEPUTIES STRESS IMPORTANCE OF "SOCIAL"

Classified By: Ambassador Mark Langdale for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

¶11. (C) On May 29, Ambassador hosted all five deputies-elect of the Social Christian Unity Party (PUSC) for breakfast. They all expressed support for the Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) but were concerned about opposition from labor trade unions, some agricultural groups, students, and the Citizens' Action Party (PAC). Deputy-elect Ana Helena Chacon said that confrontation during the process of ratification was inevitable: "we just have to make sure we don't lose." Faction leader Lorena Vasquez told us, the PUSC strategy was to promote a "social agenda" that will, in essence, buy off some of the opposition to the agreement. End summary.

PUSC Puts on a Brave Face

¶12. (C) The February 5 general elections were a disaster for PUSC. The party won only five of the 57 seats in the Legislative Assembly, down from the 19 seats in the last election, and its presidential candidate got only 3.5 percent of the vote. The party has been buffeted by corruption scandals that for a while put its last two former presidents (Rafael Angel Calderon and Miguel Angel Rodriguez) in jail and by the notoriously ineffective presidential administration of PUSC member Abel Pacheco.

¶13. (C) The five deputies-elect owe their positions to Rafael Angel Calderon who has reemerged as party boss even while fighting off corruption charges. Calderon determined the party lists and selected candidates of proven loyalty to him. Of the five elected deputies, four have served previously in the Legislative Assembly, and the fifth, Ana Helena Chacon, was until recently Vice Minister of Public Security. During the breakfast, they reflected optimism that as a centrist party they can hold the balance of power in the Assembly and make a difference after they take office on May 1.

CAFTA-DR a Priority

¶14. (C) Lorena Vasquez, who will be the PUSC faction leader in the Assembly, noted the close relations between her party and the U.S. Embassy over the years. She said that PUSC fully recognized the importance of ratifying and implementing a free trade agreement with Costa Rica's most important trading partner, the United States. She regretted the weakness of the Pacheco government whose lack of vision and purpose delayed ratification and led to the exit from government of the entire team of CAFTA-DR negotiators.

¶15. (C) Deputy-elect Bienvenido Venegas said that while dialogue with civil society on CAFTA-DR and other issues was important, the current Legislative Assembly went too far by creating so-called mixed commissions in which elected deputies sat together and negotiated with non-elected representatives of labor unions and community organizations. He said it was important to recognize the limits of dialogue and that his party and the PAC, for example, were bound to be on opposite sides of most issues.

Opposition to CAFTA-DR

¶16. (C) Deputy-elect Jorge Eduardo Sanchez harked back to 2000 when street demonstrations ultimately defeated the Rodriguez government's plan to partially privatize the Costa Rican Electricity Institute (ICE). He said that many groups with various grievances against the government came together in defense of the state monopoly. The government was forced to back down even though it had the support of the vast majority of the legislature. Sanchez was concerned that that could happen again in the battle to ratify CAFTA-DR.

¶17. (C) Deputy-elect Chacon said that a confrontation with

the labor unions over CAFTA-DR was inevitable; "we just have to make sure we don't lose." She noted from her time in the Ministry of Public Security deep suspicions that the government of Venezuela was financing and fomenting anti-government demonstrations and in particular was behind efforts to defeat CAFTA-DR. She said what the GOCR lacked was proof, and she urged that the USG provide more assistance on intelligence matters.

Dividing the Opposition

¶ 8. (C) Lorena Vasquez said it was important for the government to engage civil society and opponents of CAFTA-DR. She said that PUSC will support a "social agenda" (read complementary agenda) that will lessen the harm suffered by the "losers" in CAFTA-DR. She noted that some labor union leaders and the PAC will never support CAFTA-DR, but it is possible to effectively buy off some of their potential allies.

¶ 9. (C) Deputies-elect Jose Luis Vasquez and Jorge Eduardo Sanchez agreed with Lorena Vasquez, stressing that the successful ratification and implementation of CAFTA-DR depended on dividing the opposition and preventing the formation of a massive anti-CAFTA-DR bloc. Sanchez added that it was essential that the entire government speak with one voice on CAFTA-DR. A major problem in the Pacheco administration was that it appeared that only the Foreign Trade Ministry supported the agreement with the rest of government either ambivalent or silent.

Comment

¶ 10. (C) PUSC appears to be on board to support CAFTA-DR but not as enthusiastically as either the ruling National Liberation Party (with 25 deputies) or Libertarian Movement Party (with six deputies). PUSC deputies will defend their concept of "social justice," which means that their support for CAFTA-DR is to some extent conditioned on a satisfactory complementary agenda. With PUSC, we count a total of 38 votes out of 57 in support of CAFTA-DR ratification. Due to Costa Rica's painstaking parliamentary procedures and the lack of progress until now, it could be many months before a vote on CAFTA-DR takes place. An early test of how long the ratification process will take will be whether the rules of the Legislative Assembly can be modified to streamline its deliberation process

LANGDALE